



NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION (NVC) GUIDELINES FOR TEACHERS



CONTENT

1.	What is Nonviolent Communication.....	2
2.	The Four Steps of NVC.....	4
	2.a. How to use the Four NVC Components with students in school settings	7
	2.b. How to use the Four NVC steps with children aged 0–6.....	11
3.	Strategies for using NVC in classrooms.....	14
4.	Integrating NVC Across the School Culture....	27
5.	Conclusions.....	32
6.	Suggested Readings.....	34



1.

WHAT IS NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION?

Nonviolent Communication (NVC), developed by Marshall B. Rosenberg, is a communication approach grounded in empathy, clarity, and mutual respect. Its purpose is to help individuals connect with themselves and others in ways that reduce conflict, increase cooperation, and foster emotional safety.

NVC views conflict as a natural and potentially constructive part of human interaction. Rather than avoiding disagreements, it encourages transforming them into opportunities for understanding and growth. Core intentions of NVC are therefore:

- To create connection rather than coercion.
- To support autonomy and shared power, moving from “power over” to “power with.”
- To cultivate empathy as a way to understand the feelings and needs behind behaviours.
- To communicate clearly and compassionately without blame, judgment, or punishment.

Marshall Rosenberg explains that the basis of NVC is the understanding that human needs lie at the core of all conflicts. People do not clash because they are “wrong,” “difficult,” or “oppositional,” but because they are attempting, often without awareness, to meet essential human needs such as safety, belonging, autonomy, respect, play, rest, meaning, and connection.

In NVC, the concept of needs is foundational. The core principle states that **all human actions – helpful or unhelpful, calm or disruptive – are attempts to meet universal human needs**. These needs are not desires, preferences, or behaviours; they are the essential qualities that every



human being requires to thrive, such as safety, belonging, autonomy, understanding, rest, play, contribution, and connection. Because these needs are universal, they form common ground between individuals: teachers, students, and families all share them, even if they try to meet them in very different ways.

What NVC emphasises is that **behaviour is never the problem, unmet needs are**. When students act out, withdraw, refuse to participate, or interrupt, their behaviour is not a sign of a “bad attitude” or a “problem personality”; it is a signal that something important is missing. A child who disrupts the class may be seeking belonging or attention. A student who refuses a task may be protecting their need for autonomy or competence. A child who lashes out physically may be overwhelmed and needing emotional safety or support. When teachers recognise behaviour as communication, they can respond to what truly matters rather than reacting to the surface-level action.

Understanding needs reframes conflict from a battle of wills into an opportunity for connection and problem-solving.

Instead of asking:

“Why is this child behaving like this?” educators begin asking “What is this child trying to achieve or protect?” and “How can we help meet this need in a healthier way?” .

This shift does not excuse harmful behaviour, but it creates a compassionate, effective pathway for change. When needs are identified and addressed, students feel seen and supported, and teachers gain clarity and options for guiding behaviour. In this way, needs-awareness becomes a tool for empathy, resilience, and long-term transformation in the school environment.

Therefore, in NVC’s view:



- Behaviours are simply strategies (sometimes helpful, sometimes unhelpful) that people use to meet their needs.
- Conflict signals that important needs are not being recognised or fulfilled, either for one person or for everyone involved.
- When underlying needs are acknowledged and named, the tension shifts: instead of debating who is right, people can search for strategies that consider everyone's needs.

This perspective turns conflict into an opportunity for clarity, empathy, and collaboration, making it far easier to transform disagreements into mutually satisfying solutions.

2. THE FOUR STEPS OF NVC

Nonviolent Communication offers four core components that help teachers and students understand situations clearly, express themselves authentically, and respond with empathy. These components provide a simple and powerful structure for transforming daily classroom interactions, especially during conflict.

These steps are not meant to be followed as a script, but as a way of thinking that supports emotional safety, clarity, and cooperation in school environments.

1. Observation : What happened?

The first component is describing what you see or hear without adding judgments, assumptions, or interpretations.

In school settings, this means:

- focusing on concrete behaviours,
- avoiding labels like “disruptive,” “lazy,” “aggressive,” “rude,” etc.,
- preventing defensiveness by sticking to facts.



Examples:

- Observation: *"I heard talking while I was giving instructions."*
- Not an observation: *"You weren't respecting me."*

Observations help everyone stay grounded in reality rather than arguing about motives or character.

2. Feelings : How do I feel about what happened?

After naming the observation, NVC invites us to identify our **real emotions**. Feelings show the inner impact of a situation. In classroom life, naming feelings helps modelling emotional literacy for students, defuses tension by shifting from blame to self-awareness and helps children learn that emotions are valid and manageable.

Examples of true feelings:

- *"I feel confused," "I feel sad," "I feel excited," "I feel worried."*

Not feelings (but thoughts or judgments):

- *"I feel like you don't care."*
- *"I feel ignored."*
- *"I feel disrespected."*

These statements describe what we believe others are doing—not how we actually feel.

Teaching students to identify real emotions strengthens their ability to understand themselves and others.

3. Needs : What matters to me (or to the student)?

Needs are the universal human motivations behind every feeling. They are not personal preferences or strategies—they are what all human beings require to flourish.



In schools, common needs include:

- Safety (emotional + physical)
- Belonging and inclusion
- Respect
- Autonomy and choice
- Clarity or structure
- Support
- Rest, play, creativity

4. Requests : Asking for clear, doable actions (not demands)

Requests are specific, concrete actions that help meet needs in the present moment. In NVC, where needs are universal and human, requests are the *strategies* we propose to meet those needs. For teachers, making clear, respectful requests invites cooperation rather than demanding compliance.

A request in classroom life is:

- **Specific** → an observable action the student can understand (e.g., “Would you raise your hand before speaking?”),
- **Positive** → expressing what we *want*, rather than what we want to stop,
- **Doable now** → something the student can carry out immediately,
- **Open to dialogue** → allowing the student to say yes, no, or offer an alternative.

Examples:

- “Would you be willing to raise your hand before speaking?”
- “Could you sit next to me while we go over this together?”
- “Would you put the markers back in the basket?”

Rosenberg identified two types of requests:

1. **Action Requests** → asking for a specific behaviour.
 - “Would you walk instead of running in the hallway?”



2. **Connection Requests** → asking for understanding or emotional clarity.

- “Could you tell me what you heard me say?”
- “Can you share how you’re feeling about this?”

Requests become demands when:

- refusal leads to punishment or blame,
- the adult withdraws approval, connection, or warmth,
- there is no openness to negotiation or alternative strategies.

2.a. How to use the 4 NVC components with students in school settings?

The four components of NVC (Observation, Feelings, Needs, and Requests) can be applied meaningfully with students of all ages. The key is adapting the language, slowing down the process, and meeting students at their developmental level. Whether you teach young children, primary school pupils, or adolescents, NVC offers a powerful structure for supporting emotional literacy, reducing conflict, and building a cooperative classroom culture.

The following guidance shows how teachers can use each NVC component with students, merging principles for young children with adaptations for older students.

1. **Observation** : Stating what happened clearly and without judgment

Students respond best when teachers describe facts, not character traits or intentions.

For young children:



- “I see blocks on the floor.”
- “I notice you pushed Luca.”
- “I hear shouting.”

For older students:

- “I saw two students talking while instructions were being given.”
- “I noticed the assignment wasn’t handed in today.”

Avoid labels such as “good,” “bad,” “lazy,” “rude,” or “disrespectful.” These create shame, confusion, or resistance.

Clear observations help students understand exactly what behaviour is being discussed.

2. **Feelings : Helping students recognize and express emotions**

Children and adolescents often struggle to identify and articulate their feelings. It is important to help them naming emotions as this also builds emotional literacy, self-awareness, and empathy.

Teachers can support emotional awareness by:

- naming feelings directly,
- guessing feelings when appropriate,
- differentiating between feelings and judgments.

For young children:

- “Are you feeling sad because your tower fell?”
- “You look frustrated. Is that right?”
- “Are you excited to show me your drawing?”



For primary and secondary students:

- “I’m wondering if you’re feeling overwhelmed by the assignment?”
- “Are you feeling worried about presenting today?”
- “It seems like you might be frustrated. Is that accurate?”



Avoid disguised judgments:

- “Are you feeling rude?”
- “Are you upset because she did it on purpose?”

3. Needs : Interpreting behaviour through the lens of universal human needs

As said before, all behaviour—even challenging behaviour—is an attempt to meet a need. Understanding this helps teachers stay empathic and reduces punitive responses.

Common needs in school settings:

- safety (emotional + physical)
- connection and belonging
- autonomy and choice
- play, movement, creativity
- predictability and clarity
- respect and fairness
- rest, comfort
- competence and support



For young children:

- A child hitting may need connection, space, or help handling frustration.
- A child refusing circle time may need autonomy or sensory comfort.
- A crying child may need closeness or predictability.

For older students:

- A student talking out of turn may need attention or inclusion.
- A disengaged student may need meaning, relevance, or confidence.
- A resistant student may need autonomy, respect, or clarity.

When teachers identify needs (rather than punish behaviours) they support self-regulation, trust, and long-term skill-building.

Some Basic Feelings We All Have



Feelings when needs are fulfilled

- Amazed
- Comfortable
- Confident
- Eager
- Energetic
- Fulfilled
- Glad
- Hopeful
- Inspired
- Intrigued
- Joyous
- Moved
- Optimistic
- Proud
- Relieved
- Stimulated
- Surprised
- Thankful
- Touched
- Trustful

Feelings when needs are not fulfilled

- Angry
- Annoyed
- Concerned
- Confused
- Disappointed
- Discouraged
- Distressed
- Embarrassed
- Frustrated
- Helpless
- Hopeless
- Impatient
- Irritated
- Lonely
- Nervous
- Overwhelmed
- Puzzled
- Reluctant
- Sad
- Uncomfortable

Some Basic Needs We All Have



Autonomy

- Choosing dreams/goals/values
- Choosing plans for fulfilling one's dreams, goals, values

Celebration

- Celebrating the creation of life and dreams fulfilled
- Celebrating losses: loved ones, dreams, etc. (mourning)

Integrity

- Authenticity • Creativity
- Meaning • Self-worth

Interdependence

- Acceptance • Appreciation
- Closeness • Community
- Consideration
- Contribution to the enrichment of life
- Emotional Safety • Empathy

Physical Nurturance

- Air • Food
- Movement, exercise
- Protection from life-threatening forms of life: viruses, bacteria, insects, predatory animals
- Rest • Sexual expression
- Shelter • Touch • Water

Play

- Fun • Laughter

Spiritual Communion

- Beauty • Harmony
- Inspiration • Order • Peace
- Honesty (the empowering honesty that enables us to learn from our limitations)
- Love • Reassurance
- Respect • Support
- Trust • Understanding

©CNVC. Please visit www.cnvc.org to learn more.

“Feelings and Needs we all have” in *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life* (Rosenberg, 1999).

4. **Requests** : Offering concrete, doable, respectful options

Requests help students know exactly what action will support the learning environment. They must be specific, positive, doable, and open to dialogue.

For young children:

- “Would you put the blocks in the basket?”
- “Can you hold my hand while we walk?”
- “Let’s take turns : do you want to go first or second?”

For primary and secondary students:

- “Would you be willing to raise your hand before speaking?”
- “Could you work with your partner for the next 10 minutes?”
- “Would you tell me what you understood from the instructions?”

Avoid vague or abstract requests:

- “Be nice.”
- “Calm down.”
- “Pay attention.”

Requests become demands when refusal leads to blame, punishment, withdrawal of warmth, or no space for negotiation.

Using requests instead of demands supports autonomy, cooperation, and intrinsic motivation across all ages.

2.b. How to use the four NVC steps with children aged 0–6



Using Nonviolent Communication with children aged 0–6 requires simplicity, warmth, and attunement. Young children communicate mostly through behaviour, tone, and gesture long before they can express their inner world with words. For this reason, NVC in early childhood is less about teaching children the four steps explicitly and more about adults *embodying* them—observing without judgment, naming feelings gently, interpreting behaviour through the lens of needs, and offering concrete, compassionate requests. When adults respond to behaviours such as crying, clinging, grabbing, or pushing with curiosity rather than blame, children experience emotional safety. Over time, this approach supports the development of secure attachment, emotional regulation, empathy, and frustration tolerance.

NVC is essential in early childhood, as children from birth to six:

- communicate mainly through body language, voice tone, and behaviour,
- experience strong emotions without the cognitive tools to make sense of them,
- depend on adults to help regulate their nervous systems,
- need consistent empathy to develop secure attachment and emotional intelligence.

NVC offers adults a structure to interpret early childhood behaviours as **expressions of needs**, not “misbehaviour.” This shift prevents shame, fear, or punishment from entering the learning environment and instead supports healthy emotional development.

PRACTICAL NVC STRATEGIES FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD SETTING

1 Use simple sentences : this validates feelings and builds trust. **Sentences could look like:**

- “You’re upset. I’m here.”



- “You didn’t want that to happen.”
- “That surprised you!”

2 Say aloud what need the behaviour might express : this models curiosity instead of judgment. **This could be:**

- “You want space.”
- “You want to play with the same toy.”
- “You want help.”

3 Offer two choices : young children feel empowered when they choose, but sometimes if we offer too many choices, this overwhelms them. Giving few choices allow them to exercise their interest and orient themselves and understand what they like and need: **You could for instance ask:**

- “Do you want the red cup or the blue cup?”
- “Do you want to tidy the blocks or the crayons first?”

4 Visual schedules, gesture-based requests, and consistent routines help meet children’s needs for safety and structure.

5 Pay attention to your presence. Children feel safety before they understand language. In early childhood, the adult’s tone, body language, and calm presence communicate more than words. **Before using any NVC language, ensure:**

- your voice is warm,
- your posture is non-threatening,
- your attention is fully on the child.

EXAMPLES OF 4 STEPS OF NVC WITH 0-6 CHILDREN

Example 1 : Conflict over a toy

Observation: “I see you both want the same truck.” **Feeling:** “You look frustrated.” **Need:** “You both need a turn to play.” **Request:** “Shall we set a timer so each of you gets a turn?”

Example 2 : Child pushing another



Observation: "I saw you push Sam." **Feeling:** "Are you feeling overwhelmed?" **Need:** "Do you need space or help with your big feelings?" **Request:** "Let's sit together for a moment. Would you like to breathe with me or hold your teddy?"

Example 3 : Transition difficulty

Observation: "It's time to stop playing. I see it's hard to leave the dolls." **Feeling:** "Are you feeling sad or disappointed?" **Need:** "You want more time to play." **Request:** "Would you like to bring one doll with you to the table?"

3. STRATEGIES FOR USING NVC IN THE CLASSROOM

Creating an NVC-informed classroom means shaping daily practices, relationships, and learning environments so that empathy, mutual respect, and shared responsibility become the norm. The goal is not to "apply a technique," but to build a culture where feelings and needs are acknowledged, conflicts are transformed, and cooperation replaces coercion. Below are some tips to support the application of NVC in any classroom.

3.1 Meeting basic physiological needs in School

Before students can learn effectively or engage in emotional regulation, their basic physiological needs must be met. In NVC terms, these needs — such as thirst, hunger, rest, movement, and physical comfort — are **foundational**. When these needs are unmet, children often express discomfort through behaviours that may appear as "disruptive," "unfocused," or "uncooperative." Yet these behaviours are not defiance : they are strategies children use to cope with unmet survival-level needs.



Many school environments unintentionally overlook these needs by requiring children to sit still for long periods, delaying snacks or bathroom breaks, or limiting movement to scheduled moments. Research in developmental psychology and embodied cognition shows that movement, hydration, and nutrition directly impact attention, emotional regulation, memory, and executive function.

Supporting these basic needs can look like:

- allowing movement breaks throughout lessons,
- encouraging hydration and easy access to water,
- offering flexible seating or calm corners,
- being attentive to hunger, fatigue, and sensory needs,
- providing short “reset moments” for transitions.

When teachers recognise these needs as normal and universal rather than as behaviour problems, the classroom becomes a more compassionate, responsive, and effective learning environment. **Meeting basic physiological needs is not separate from education but a prerequisite for it.**



***Class exercise: Body–Needs Check-In.** An exercise to build a routine to helps students develop interoception (i.e. the ability to notice internal bodily signals) and learn to care for their needs proactively :*

- 1. Create a simple chart with icons for thirst, hunger, movement, comfort, and rest.*
- 2. Begin the day or a long lesson with the question: “What does your body need right now to learn well?”*
- 3. Students point to or place a marker on the icon that matches their current need.*
- 4. Offer a brief moment to meet that need (a sip of water, a stretch, deep breaths, adjusting seating).*



3.2. Model the Language and Spirit of NVC

Research shows that when teachers model empathy and non-judgmental language, the entire classroom climate shifts toward safety, respect, and cooperation. Children learn NVC primarily by seeing adults use it.

Teachers become powerful role models when they:

- speak in observations instead of judgments,
- name their feelings and needs calmly,
- listen with curiosity rather than reacting,
- ask for cooperation instead of demanding obedience.



Teacher Self-Exercise: The 2-Minute Self-Empathy Reset. This exercise helps teachers regulate themselves before responding to students. It can be done quietly at your desk, in the hallway, or even during class transitions:

1. *Notice your body. Pause and sense physical cues: tight shoulders, shallow breath, heat, tension. Ask silently: "What is happening in my body right now?"*
2. *Name your feeling. Identify the genuine emotion underneath the reaction. Examples: "I feel overwhelmed... tense... irritated... tired."*
3. *Connect with your need. Gently explore what human need is alive in you. Examples: "I need support... clarity... ease... respect... order... a moment of calm."*
4. *Choose one small compassionate action. Examples: taking three slow breaths, adjusting your posture, placing a hand on your heart, choosing a calmer tone before speaking, asking a colleague for brief support.*

3.3. Use the Giraffe and Jackal to Teach Communication

Marshall Rosenberg introduced two symbolic animals – **the Giraffe and the Jackal** – to make NVC concrete, playful, and easy to understand for learners of all ages.



Jackal Language represents communication rooted in:

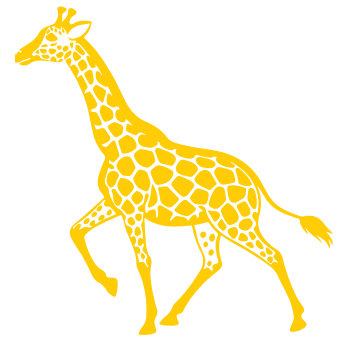
- blame and criticism,
- labels and moral judgments,
- right/wrong thinking,
- assumptions about intention.

It sounds like: “You never listen,” “Stop being annoying,” “You always interrupt.” This form of communication often escalates conflict and disconnect.

Giraffe Language, in contrast, symbolizes NVC’s compassionate approach. The giraffe has the largest heart of any land animal, representing empathy, and its long neck symbolizes perspective and understanding.

Giraffe communication includes:

- observations without judgment,
- genuine feelings instead of accusations,
- universal needs instead of diagnoses,
- respectful, doable requests instead of demands.



How to use this strategy in class:

- Buy or make Giraffe and Jackal puppets to support storytelling, circle time, role-play, or conflict mediation.
- Introduce the animals as “two ways we can choose to speak.” Let students name examples of each style.
- Create a ‘Giraffe & Jackal Board’ where students can pin example sentences they transform.
- Do translation activities: write common classroom frustrations (“You’re so annoying!” “This is stupid!”) on cards and have students rewrite them in Giraffe Language.
- Use puppets during conflict-resolution: invite students to replay a moment using the giraffe puppet to express needs and make requests.
- Encourage self-reflection: ask students, “Was that Jackal or Giraffe? What would the giraffe say instead?”





Class exercise: Giraffe & Jackal Language

1. Introduce the two symbolic languages Rosenberg used: Giraffe (heart language) and Jackal (judgment language).
2. Invite students to translate "jackal sentences" (e.g., "You always interrupt!") into giraffe statements.

3.4. Create moments for emotional check-ins

Regular emotional check-ins normalize feelings and help students develop emotional literacy. Emotional literacy reduces reactivity and helps students understand themselves before conflict escalates.

Examples:

- "How are you arriving today?" (students choose from a feelings chart)
- A "weather report" of feelings: sunny, cloudy, stormy, foggy.
- A "feelings circle" where each child shares one feeling without explanation.



Exercise: Feelings Charades. Students draw cards with feeling words and act them out while peers guess.

3.5. Teach needs literacy (the heart of conflict transformation)

According to Rosenberg, when people understand needs, conflict becomes solvable rather than personal. Help students identify the universal needs behind their behaviours.

One possible way to trace needs is to create a classroom posters that can include needs such as:

- safety, respect, connection,
- choice, understanding, fun, support,
- fairness, inclusion, rest.



[Here you can find a list of basic needs and feelings that you can print and use for your work](#)





Exercise: Needs Detective. When a conflict arises, guide students through questions like:

- "What are you needing right now?"
- "What might the other person be needing?"

3.6. Establish a conflict-transformation routine

Use a simple structure students can rely on, following the 4 steps of NVC. (observation, feelings, needs, request). In order to put this in place, could help having a class corner dedicated to conflict-transformation.

Ideally students would ask to have a conflict resolution moment, but teachers can prevent escalation by noticing subtle cues such as: sudden silence or withdrawal, agitation, fidgeting, or restless movements, sharp tones or defensive body language, repeated friction between the same students or rapid mood or energy shifts.

In case these indication happens, teachers can intervene gently by saying something like:

- "I'm noticing some tension—shall we pause for a moment?"
- "It looks like something happened. Do you want support at the Conflict Corner?"
- "I sense frustration—would anyone like help sorting out what's going on?"

Another useful way is to help students detect their own tension (exercise 3.5 - needs detective) that could start from physical synonyms like: tight stomach, clenched jaw, shaky hands, urge to shout or shut down, thoughts like "This isn't fair!" or "I want to leave!"



Tool: The Conflict Corner. A dedicated classroom space where students can step aside to calm down, reflect, and work through conflict using NVC.



What to include:

- *feelings & needs cards,*
- *NVC dialogue scripts (sentence starters for each step),*
- *calming objects (soft items, textures, stress balls),*
- *grounding tools (breathing cards, sensory objects),*
- *a sand timer for turn-taking,*
- *space for drawing or writing reflections.*

Students may go alone, with a peer, or with teacher guidance.

3.7. Respond to challenging behaviour with curiosity instead of punishment

Challenging behaviour is often interpreted as defiance, disrespect, or disobedience. From an NVC and pedagogical perspective, however, behaviour is not a problem to be controlled, but a form of communication. Students behave in certain ways because they are trying, often unsuccessfully, to meet underlying needs such as safety, belonging, autonomy, clarity, or support. Educational research, including trauma-informed practices, Self-Determination Theory and socio-emotional learning frameworks, supports the same idea : unmet needs express themselves through behaviour, and punitive reactions often intensify the very behaviours teachers want to reduce.

Instead of asking, “Why are you doing this?”, which implies blame and triggers defensiveness, teachers can shift toward curiosity : “What are you needing right now?” “What happened for you?”, “How can we support you?”

This approach:

- avoids blame, shame, or threats,
- maintains connection with students who are struggling,
- Reduces power struggles,
- helps identify root causes rather than reacting to symptoms,



- models emotional regulation and empathy,
- supports intrinsic motivation and self-responsibility.

What is more, curiosity instead of blame also communicates to students: “Your behaviour makes sense when we understand your needs.” This message reduces fear and increases cooperation.



***Exercise: De-escalation through empathic guessing.** This practice helps teachers guide students toward emotional awareness and need recognition.*

- 1. When a student is upset or acting out, the teacher offers gentle “empathy guesses,” such as:*
 - *“Are you feeling frustrated because you need more clarity?”*
 - *“Are you needing space right now?”*
 - *“Are you feeling worried because you want fairness?”*
- 2. The student responds by confirming, clarifying, or correcting the guess:*
 - *“No, I’m not frustrated, I’m scared I’ll get it wrong.” / “I don’t need space—I need help.”*
- 3. The teacher reflects the student’s response, reinforcing the connection.*

3.8. Use Collaborative Rule-Making

Traditional classroom rules are often created for students rather than with them. This can lead to compliance based on fear, habit, or adult authority rather than genuine understanding or ownership. From an NVC point of view, rules grounded in universal human needs (safety, respect, belonging, clarity, fairness, autonomy, support..) naturally invite cooperation, because they talk to what every person requires to thrive.

When learners help create the agreements, they understand why each expectation exists and feel part of a community rather than subjects of authority. This shifts the dynamic from “obeying rules” to caring for



shared needs. In these circumstances, students internalise expectations rather than following them out of fear, while feeling respected, heard, and empowered.

Pedagogically, this approach is supported by research on :

- > **Self-Determination theory** : students are more motivated when autonomy, competence, and belonging are supported.
- > **Restorative practices** : shared agreements promote community responsibility and reduce punitive interventions.
- > **Democratic Education**: students who participate in rule-making develop stronger ethical reasoning and social responsibility.



Activity: *How to introduce collaborative rule-making?*

1. **Begin with needs, not behaviours.** Ask: “What do we need in this class to learn well and feel safe?” (answers can be respect, calm, focus, fairness, fun, inclusion...).
2. **Translate needs into behaviours (agreements):**
 - Together, transform needs into clear, specific actions. Students can be grouped in small groups to discuss one specific need, and how to translate it into a rule. It is also important that teachers needs and all school actors are considered!
 - Need: Respect → Agreement: we listen when someone is speaking.
 - Need: Safety → Agreement: we move calmly in the classroom.
 - Need: Inclusion → Agreement: we invite everyone into group work.
 - Need: Clarity → Agreement: we ask questions when we’re unsure.
3. **Ensure mutuality:**
 - Teachers also commit to the agreements, modeling shared responsibility. “I agree to explain instructions clearly.” “I agree to listen without interrupting.”



Post and revisit the agreements. *Display them visually, refer to them during conflict, and revise them mid-year.*

3.9. Build empathy through learning processes that are cooperative

Empathy is not learned through lectures: it is learned through interaction. Cooperative learning structures create the relational conditions in which students experience interdependence, shared responsibility, and mutual support. NVC thrives in these environments because students naturally engage with one another's perspectives, feelings, and needs. When students collaborate, they do not simply complete tasks, but they *practice* being in community. They encounter different viewpoints, negotiate meaning, and work through conflict. These are essential conditions for internalising NVC as a lived practice rather than a scripted tool. Indeed, students in cooperative settings are more inclined to become attuned to others' feelings and needs, and they learn to resolve disagreements collaboratively. In these contexts, students shift from adversarial thinking ("me vs. you") to collective responsibility ("we are in this together").

From a pedagogical standpoint, cooperative learning is supported by many theories, among which are :

- Social Interdependence Theory: learners build a deeper understanding when they work toward shared goals.
- Vygotskian Social Constructivism: learning emerges through dialogue and co-construction of meaning.
- Restorative Education: rather than rules, relationships form the foundation of classroom stability.
- SEL (Social-Emotional Learning) frameworks: collaboration strengthens empathy, communication, and emotional regulation.

How to integrate cooperative structures:

> **Peer-learning groups:** students teach or explain concepts to one another, learning to listen and support.



- > **Think-pair-share:** encourages all students to voice ideas in low-pressure dyads before speaking publicly.
- > **Collaborative problem-solving:** groups must navigate differing perspectives and propose solutions together.
- > **Mixed-ability partnerships:** avoid social hierarchies by rotating pairs and emphasizing shared strengths.



***Exercise: Walk in someone's shoes.** Students role-play different perspectives in a conflict scenario. Each student temporarily “steps into” the experience of another person and expresses:*

- *what they observed,*
- *what they might be feeling,*
- *what they might be needing.*

This activity:

- *strengthens perspective-taking,*
- *reduces blame and personalisation of conflict,*
- *builds emotional vocabulary,*
- *prepares students to use NVC dialogue authentically.*



3.10. Encourage honest expression safely

Honest expression is a core pillar of Nonviolent Communication. In NVC, authenticity is not merely “speaking your mind,” but revealing your inner experience (observations, feelings, needs, requests) without blame or judgement. A classroom that welcomes honest expression fosters psychological safety, strengthens relationships, and supports deeper learning. Creating such a climate requires structures, rituals, and agreements that protect students from shame, ridicule, or interpersonal risk when sharing their feelings and needs.

To build norms for safe, honest expression you can:



1 Co-create communication agreements

Invite students to help define how they want to speak and be spoken to.

Examples:

- “We describe what happened instead of making accusations.”
- “We speak from our own experience (‘I-statements’).”
- We listen to understand, not to respond.”

2 Teach NVC sentence frames

Provide scaffolds students can rely on based on the four step of NVC that we analysed before, until the language becomes natural:

- “When ___ happens, I feel ___ because I need ___.”
- “My request is...”
- “Would you be willing to...?”

These frames help students avoid blame and instead reveal inner experience.

3 Validate all feelings and guide their expression

Normalize emotional diversity: frustration, excitement, worry, boredom, confusion. Emphasise the fact that **all** feelings are welcome and that **not all** behaviours are helpful.

4 Model vulnerability as an educator

Teachers can safely model NVC: the more they will use NVC language, the more students will also do. As a teacher you can for instance say: “When several students speak while I’m explaining, I feel overwhelmed because I need clarity. Would you pause for a moment?” This normalizes emotional expression without authority-based coercion.



Exercise: Class ritual. Create weekly reflective circles where students reflect on moments when they: acted with empathy, resolved a conflict, expressed themselves honestly.

Possible Guiding Prompts (students choose which to answer)

- “A moment this week when I expressed myself honestly was...”



- *“A moment when someone showed empathy to me...”*
- *“A conflict I managed or repaired...”*
- *“Something I felt proud of or grateful for...”*
- *“A need that was met or unmet this week...”*

3.11. Support teacher self-empathy

Teachers cannot cultivate empathy in students when they themselves are emotionally depleted. NVC emphasises that self-empathy is not self-indulgence but a professional competency : the ability to recognise one’s internal state, regulate it, and respond from grounded presence rather than reactivity. When teachers practice consistent emotional self-awareness, classroom conflict decreases, communication improves, and the overall school climate becomes more cooperative and calm. Teachers are the emotional regulators of the learning environment; their self-connection sets the tone for student behaviour.

Self-empathy is the internal application of NVC’s four components – observation, feeling, need, request – toward oneself. It can be woven into transitions, moments of overwhelm, before entering class, or after a challenging interaction.

It would be ideal for teachers to have school support in their journey to NVC. **To embed teacher self-empathy culturally, schools can, for instance:**

- Include a 1-minute grounding pause at the start of staff meetings.
- Encourage peer empathy partnerships (“empathy buddies”).
- Provide quiet spaces for staff micro-breaks.
- Normalise help-seeking as a professional strength, not a weakness.



Exercise: The 20-Second Reset



1. *Take 3 slow breaths*
 2. *Place a hand on your chest or stomach.*
 3. *Name one feeling ("I feel...")*
 4. *Name one need ("because I need...")*
 5. *Optional: Name one small action that would support you next.*
- Example: "Breathing... I feel tense because I need a sense of order and support. My next step is to slow down my voice before giving instructions."*

4. INTEGRATE NVC ACROSS THE SCHOOL CULTURE

For NVC to create lasting change, it must move beyond isolated lessons and individual teacher practice and become part of the whole-school ethos. When NVC is embedded across the entire environment, schools experience fewer conflicts, improved staff collaboration, and a more inclusive, trusting climate.

Here you can find Key Strategies for whole-school integration:

1. Shared language and agreements

Develop simple, schoolwide communication agreements based on NVC principles, that can be displayed in classrooms, hallways, and staff rooms.

For example:

- "We speak from our own experience."
- "We describe what happened rather than blame."
- "We listen to understand feelings and needs."



2. Staff training and ongoing professional learning

NVC implementation is strongest when **all** staff receive training, not only teachers but also: teaching assistants, school leadership, administrative staff, cafeteria and playground supervisors etc etc..

3. Student leadership and peer support

Empower students to become ambassadors of empathy by: creating peer mediator programs, offering NVC clubs or committees, training older students to model and teach younger peers.

This reinforces “**power with**” dynamics and builds democratic participation.

4. Integrate NVC into daily routines

Embed micro-practices into predictable structures throughout the school day:

- morning check-ins (“Feeling & Needs Boards”),
- conflict corners,
- reflection circles,
- quiet reset spaces for regulation.

Everyday routines reinforce the message: ***emotions matter; needs matter; relationships matter.***



5. Embed NVC Into disciplinary and restorative practices

Replace punitive approaches with restorative systems grounded in NVC:

- Restorative conversations guided by needs instead of blame
- Repair agreements instead of punishments
- Adults model empathy during escalations

This links to the best practices found in the **EduCATE conflict transformation model**.

6. Family and community engagement

Extend NVC beyond the school walls to create true cultural coherence:

- Offer family workshops on NVC basics
- Translate NVC resources into home languages
- Share simple weekly prompts (“Ask your child about a need they named today”)

Community alignment enhances **trust** and **continuity**

7. Leadership modeling

School leaders set the emotional tone. When principals and administrators make decisions transparently, communicate needs, and respond with empathy, staff mirror these behaviours.

This transforms the school from a hierarchical environment into a learning community built on dignity and mutual respect.



EXAMPLES OF NVC IN SCHOOLS

NVC is used in schools worldwide to improve classroom climate, reduce violence and bullying, support emotional literacy, and increase cooperation between students, teachers, and families.

It is effective across contexts from early childhood to adolescence, because it focuses on universal human needs and accessible communication skills. In Europe, several documented school projects have implemented NVC at the classroom or whole-school level with notable results. Below are examples of different ways European schools integrate NVC principles, ranging from whole-school models to specific classroom practices:

- **Democratic School Amsterdam** : Democratic School Amsterdam is located at Sloten Windmill in Amsterdam. With around 60 students ranging in age from 4-18 years old, is organised as a sociocratic foundation which also uses Nonviolent Communication. [Here you can find a presentation on how they use NVC](#)
- **Miteinander leben - Grundschule Friesenried** : second-grade students participate in the annual project “Wir lernen die Giraffensprache”, led by the school social worker Sindy Görner. In this initiative, children are introduced to nonviolent communication through age-appropriate exercises, using the giraffe as a symbol of empathy and heartfelt connection. They learn to identify and name their feelings, understand their own needs (and those of others), and resolve conflicts respectfully, all without assigning blame → [Link to the project](#)



- **GGG Hülsenbusch** : public primary school in Gummersbach, Germany, the “Giraffensprache” (giraffe language) is a structured part of the school’s conflict-resolution strategy. Students learn to communicate their feelings and needs in a calm and respectful way. This system is introduced from the very first grade during a dedicated method day, and **each classroom is equipped with a giraffe poster so that children can use these tools for peaceful conflict resolution at any time**
- **IS Giovanni Falcone** : the school launched a project called **“La Comunicazione NonViolenta: una nuova guida per un management di eccellenza nella scuola”** (“**NVC: a new guide for an excellent school management**”). The school organises free NVC training modules for parents from the local and regional community. The training is structured in three modules, covering the basics of Nonviolent Communication, self-empathy, managing conflict through role-play, and applying NVC in daily life and work contexts.
- **Giraffen.Schule** (Switzerland) : private school in the Swiss Rhine Valley (Heerbrugg / Diepoldsau) that bases its educational philosophy on NVC. It offers self-determined learning (no traditional grading), with mixed-age groups and a “learning companion” model rather than traditional teachers. There, students are encouraged to communicate empathetically, reflect on their needs and feelings, and resolve conflict through awareness.
- **Wildwood Nature School** (UK) : At Wildwood, children and teachers work to name feelings and needs, and resolve conflicts through NVC-style steps. **Their educational model is very community-driven and encourages self-directed learning in line with NVC’s values.**



5. CONCLUSION

Nonviolent Communication offers schools far more than a set of techniques. It provides a transformative lens through which relationships, learning, and community life can be reimagined. In an era where classrooms are increasingly diverse, emotionally complex, and socially demanding, NVC offers a coherent framework for cultivating environments where every learner feels seen, valued, and capable of growth. At its heart, NVC calls us to recognise the humanity in ourselves and in one another. It reminds us that behaviour is communication, that emotions carry wisdom, and that needs, universal and shared, form the basis of connection rather than conflict.

Throughout this guide, we explored the core pillars of NVC : observations without judgment, emotional awareness, needs-based understanding, and clear, compassionate requests. These principles form the backbone of an educational approach rooted in dignity, mutual respect, and relational safety. From early childhood to adolescence, from individual interactions to whole-school systems, NVC helps cultivate spaces where emotional expression becomes a strength, where conflicts become opportunities for learning, and where communication moves beyond compliance toward authentic collaboration.

Central to this transformation is the understanding that NVC is not only a tool for students, but also a professional practice for educators. When teachers engage in self-empathy, pausing to recognise their feelings, honour their needs, and regulate their emotional state, they become more grounded, patient, and resilient. This internal posture ripples outward : classrooms become calmer, interpersonal tensions dissolve, and teacher-student relationships deepen. A compassionate school culture begins with adults who model the emotional clarity, honesty, and presence they hope to inspire in children.



Yet implementing NVC is not without challenges. Shifting long-held communication habits, changing disciplinary mindsets, and creating emotional transparency in a school environment requires courage, patience, and ongoing reflection. Educators may initially feel uncomfortable naming needs, slowing down conversations, or choosing empathy in moments of stress.

At times, NVC may seem at odds with institutional pressures, time constraints, or behaviour expectations. Sustainable practice requires consistent support, shared commitment, and a willingness to “begin again” when old patterns reappear. NVC is not a quick intervention or a behaviour-management trick, but rather a long-term cultural journey that unfolds over months and years.

Because of this, NVC takes root most deeply when it becomes part of a school’s collective identity. A whole-school approach (where leadership, staff, students, and families share a common language of needs and feelings) creates coherence and alignment. Rituals, routines, and shared agreements turn NVC from an instructional strategy into a cultural norm. Over time, the school shifts away from reactive discipline toward proactive connection; away from hierarchical power toward shared responsibility; away from fear toward trust. In this way, NVC is not simply taught. It is **lived**.



 quest-eu.org



6.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Albe, V., & Gombert, J. (2012). Application of NVC principles in socio-scientific debates (12th grade). (No DOI available.)

Council of Europe. (2016). Competences for Democratic Culture.

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/education/competences-for-democratic-culture>

Costetti, V. (2001). Nonviolent Communication Experimental Project in Primary Schools. https://nvcnextgen.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Vilma_Costetti_Nonviolent_Communication_Experimental_Project_in_Primary_Schools.pdf

EduCATE Consortium. (2018). European Curriculum on Nonviolent Conflict Transformation (NVCT) for Educators. <https://eu.metododanielenovara.it/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/EduCATE-European-Curriculum-on-NVCT-webZ.pdf>

Frey, R. (2018). Rhetorics of Reflection: Revisiting Listening Rhetoric through Mindfulness, Empathy, and Non-violent Communication. *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 23, 14. (No DOI provided.)

Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*. New York: Bantam Books. <https://doi.org/10.1037/10514-000>

Hooper, L. (2015). Non-violent Communication (NVC) and Quality Learning Circles (QLC): A study on teachers' professional learning. <https://files.core.ac.uk/download/pdf/35473398.pdf>

Koopman, S., & Seliga, L. (2021). Teaching peace by using nonviolent communication for difficult conversations in the college classroom. *Peace and Conflict Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.46743/1082-7307/2021.1692>



Kohn, A. (2006). *Beyond Discipline: From Compliance to Community*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD. <https://www.alfiekohn.org/books/beyond-discipline/>

Lauricella, S. (2019). The Practice of Nonviolence: Teaching an Undergraduate Course in Nonviolent Communication. *Journal of Communication Pedagogy*, 2, 103–110. <https://doi.org/10.31446/JCP.2019.19>

NVC Academy. (2018). The Four Components of NVC (Handout). <https://nvcacademy.com/media/NVCA/MDL-foundations-2018/handouts/Four-Components-of-NVC.pdf>

Patfoort, P. (1995). *Uprooting Violence: Building Nonviolence*. Cobblesmith. (Print edition.)

Patfoort, P. (2001). *I Want, You Don't Want: Nonviolence Education*. Cobblesmith. (Print edition.)

Rosenberg, M. B. (1999). *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*. Encinitas, CA: PuddleDancer Press.

Rosenberg, M. B. (2004). *Raising Children Compassionately*. Encinitas, CA: PuddleDancer Press.

Rosenberg, M. B. (2012). *Living Nonviolent Communication*. Louisville, CO: Sounds True.

Rosenberg, M. B. (2015). *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life* (3rd ed.). PuddleDancer Press.

Serwer, A. (2019, November 12). Civility Is Overrated. *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2019/12/adam-serwer-civility/600784/>

Suggested website :

<https://quest-eu.org/event/past-event/nonviolent-communication-workshop/>

